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C. A. KINCAID

Sakuntala

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THE GOLDEN SERIES

TALES FROM THE INDIAN DRAMA

C. A. KINCAID

ILLUSTRATED BY LEELA SHIVESHWARKAR

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To MY MOTHER

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PREFACE

THIS little book of tales from the Indian drama is the last of the series in which I have tried to popularize the great works of the heroic period of Ancient India. I shall be more than gratified if the public extend to these tales as cordial a welcome as they have done to my *Indian Heroes*, my *Tales from the Indian Epics*, and my *Shri Krishna of Dwarka*.

The plays from which I have taken the *Tales from the Indian Drama* are five in number. 'Sakuntala' and 'Pururavas and Urvasi' (*Vikramorvasya*) are by Kalidasa. The latter is supposed to have been one of the nine gems of learning at the court of King Vikramaditya, the hero of the *Vetal Panchvimshi* and the legendary founder of the Vikramaditya era. According to Vincent Smith, however, Kalidasa really lived and wrote during the Gupta period, either at the court of King Kumaragupta, or of his son, Skandagupta. 'Rakshasa's Signet Ring' (*Mudra Rakshasa*) was written by Visakhadatta, either in the tenth or eleventh century A.D. All that is known of him is that he was the son of one Prithu, and grandson of one Vateswaradatta. 'The Toy Cart' (*Mrichchhakatika*) was written by King Shudraka. 'Malati and Madhava' (*Malati Madhava*) was written by Bhavabhuti. I have not been able to

find out anything about the lives of the two last authors.

The story of 'Rakshasa's Signet Ring' should prove of particular interest to classical scholars. The hero, Chandragupta Maurya, was the Sandrocottus who visited the camp of Alexander the Great during his invasion of India. Afterwards he overthrew the Nanda kings of Magadha, his relatives, and founded the Maurya dynasty. His grandson was the world-famous Asoka.

As the plays are only five in number, I have added to them the story of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, or 'Cloud Messenger'. The story is the merest thread, and it is impossible, either in English verse or—still more —in English prose, to do justice to the most wonderful love poem ever written. I have confined myself to giving a bare summary of it.

The verses on pages 15, 18 and 30 are by the late Mr Wilson.

C. A. K.

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SAKUNTALA

ONCE upon a time there lived in India a mighty sage called Visvamitra, who strove, by his austerities and penances, to win from the god Indra the celestial throne. To foil him, Indra sent to earth Menaka, the fairest of his dancing-girls. Menaka tempted Visvamitra and he fell: he lost heaven for the sake of her beauty. A little girl was born from their union, but Visvamitra was angry because he had yielded to temptation and would not have her near him. Menaka, her task done, returned to Amravati, Indra's heaven. So the poor little baby girl was left alone in the forest. She would have died of neglect, if the forest birds had not pitied and fed her. At last the hermit Kanva passed that way and saw her: he picked her up and took her to his hermitage on the bank of the Malini river. There she grew tall and straight like the trees of the forest, with the most perfect form and the fairest face in the world.

One day, while Dushyanta, king of Hastinapura, was hunting a stag in the forest, he came past Kanva's hermitage. The stag rushed for shelter to the sage's dwelling, and the hermit's disciples forbade the king to slay it. Dushyanta obeyed and, alighting from his chariot, he entered the hermitage.

As he rested in its cool shade, he saw several maidens come towards him bearing jars of water for the garden of the hermitage. Among them was Sakuntala. Suddenly a bee began to buzz near her and frightened her. Her companions were themselves too timid to chase it away; at last, distracted by her fears, she ran towards the hermitage where King Dushyanta sat. The king rose and stepped forward. The maidens, not knowing his rank, greeted him kindly and bade him stay. But the king had no eyes for anyone except Sakuntala; and she was no less struck by the mighty frame and handsome face of the young king.

At last Dushyanta took a ring from his finger and slipped it on Sakuntala's. All the maidens crowded round her to read the name written on it. When they read the word 'Dushyanta' they stood aside, in fear of the lord of all the land, and prayed their royal visitor to stay as long as he wished in the hermit's forest. Nothing would have pleased Dushyanta better. But he was king of Hastinapura and his duties called him there. As he thought sadly of returning, the hermits gathered round him and implored him to stay. The sage Kanva was away, and in his absence the forest demons came and hindered the hermits' sacrifices. Here was a fit excuse. To kill demons and protect hermits was a task worthy of a king. Dushyanta stayed, fought the demons, and slew them. But by the time he had finished his

task, he himself had fallen deeply in love with Sakuntala. Now he no longer thought of returning to Hastinapura. He stayed on in the forest as if to guard the Brahmins, but in real truth to woo Sakuntala. Nor was the maiden less in love with Dushyanta. He was the king of the land, in the fullness of youth and beauty. The hermits, too, sang his praises all day long, for had he not single-handed slain or driven away the demons, who tried to steal their offerings and prevent their winning the favour of the gods? Sakuntala could not, if she would, withstand Dushyanta's pleading, and, with the consent of Kanva, she became his bride.

A few months of unclouded happiness passed, but the king of Hastinapura could not stay for ever. The cares of state awaited him, and his subjects and ministers grew impatient at his absence. With great grief King Dushyanta resolved to leave Sakuntala, promising that he would return to his beloved lady as soon as he could spare a day from his royal labours. Sakuntala bade him good-bye at the outskirts of Kanva's wood. As she returned, her mind full of care and her thoughts far away with Dushyanta on the road to Hastinapura, she forgot to gather blossoms from the wayside. These she should have picked as an offering for the sage Durvasa, who had come as a visitor to the hermitage. The anchorite, furious at the neglect, called down on her a terrible curse. 'Just as you have forgotten

me,' he cried, beside himself with anger, 'so shall the one you love best forget you.' The frightened Sakuntala ran to her companions and begged them to intercede for her. One of them, Priyamvada, whose sweet voice had made her a favourite with the terrible old man, threw herself at his feet and begged him to pardon Sakuntala.

Durvasa relented, but not wholly. 'Once my word is spoken,' he said, 'it cannot be set aside. But I forgive her so far as this: if she shows his keepsake to him whom she loves best, my curse will vanish.'

Priyamvada ran back to Sakuntala to soothe her fears and tell her how she might escape the sage's curse. When Sakuntala heard what Durvasa had said, she felt happy again. 'I am safe, then,' she cried; 'I have my husband's ring on my finger and nothing could make me part with it.'

Some weeks passed, but Dushyanta did not return. So vast was the work that had arisen in his absence and so urgent the questions that faced him on his return, that he could not leave Hastinapura even for a day.

As Sakuntala waited sadly for her lord's coming, there came to her hopes of a child. She told her hopes to Kanva, who bade her leave him and go to Hastinapura. It was but right, he said, that her lord should know that a child would be born to him. With her he sent a holy matron, called Gautami, and several other maidens of the hermitage. They

went on foot, and, as the journey was long, they stopped close to a waterfall of the Ganges. By it was a shrine to Indra's queen, Sachi, and here they worshipped. As Sakuntala bathed, Dushyanta's ring slipped off her finger, without her seeing, and fell into a pool in the Ganges. Unconscious of the loss, the party rested and in the evening reached Hastinapura.

At the palace gates Gautami sent word that messengers from the sage Kanva wished to see the king. So great was the fame of Kanva that his name won them instant admission. Sakuntala, full of love for Dushyanta, was led with her companions into the king's presence. Dushyanta looked at them coldly and asked why they had come. Sakuntala, who had thought that her royal husband would at once have clasped her in his arms, was horror-struck at his cold looks.

'This lady,' said Gautami, 'is the maiden whom, a few months back, you met in Kanva's forest and married. She now hopes to bear you a child.'

'I have never even seen this lady,' replied the king scornfully.

Gautami turned to Sakuntala and said, 'Take off your veil: when he sees your face he will himself recall it.' Sakuntala did so, but the king's face showed no recognition.

'She is about to bear a child, as you say. That even I can see. But, as I have never seen her before, how can I be its father?'

Sakuntala gazed at him as if turned to stone. Suddenly she remembered Durvasa's curse, and her face brightened. 'It is because I have not shown him my ring,' she murmured, and put up her hand to show it to him. But the ring was not there.

'I have lost the king's ring,' she said to Gautami. 'It must have slipped off in the river as I worshipped at Sachi's shrine.'

Sakuntala would not give up hope without one last effort. 'My lord will perhaps remember this,' she said to Dushyanta. 'One day you and I, King Dushyanta, were together in a bower of jasmine; you were about to drink, when my pet fawn came up. You offered it water and it was too frightened to drink. But, when I gave it water in my hand, it drank it. Then you laughed and said, "Like trusts like".'

'In truth, a pretty tale!' laughed the king. 'How truly have men said that women win their goal by their sweet, false words!'

Sakuntala, crimson with shame and grief, would have fled from the palace, but the priests stopped her: for, to test her story, the king wished to see whether, on his birth, her son had the marks that denoted an heir of kings. But her mother, Menaka, pitying her state, came down in the guise of a flash of lightning, and, bearing her away, put her back in Kanva's hermitage.

Some years went by, but no thought of Sakuntala

even entered Dushyanta's head. One day his police brought to the palace a fisherman who earned a living by fishing in the Ganges river. They had caught him trying to sell a gold ring with 'Dushyanta' engraved on it. The poor fisherman was taken before the king, and told his story in faltering words.

'Two days ago,' he said, 'I caught a fish in the Ganges, great king. I cut it open, and inside I found the ring. I cannot read; so I could not tell what was engraved on it. I came to Hastinapura to sell it.'

The king took the ring, and in a flash his memory came back to him. He saw his wife Sakuntala and the forest hermitage and the jasmine-bower; and his cheeks grew scarlet as he thought of how he had sent her away.

'Set him free!' he cried to the guards. 'This fisherman, far from being guilty, has done me a great service.'

Dushyanta gave the fisherman the value of the ring in money, and sent him away. Then he resolved to go at once to the hermitage of Kanva and seek Sakuntala. But suddenly he remembered that she had been carried away from the palace, as if by a flash of lightning.

'She was Menaka's daughter,' he murmured sadly to himself. 'Menaka has taken Sakuntala with her back to Indra's heaven.'

Filled with this mistaken thought, he stayed at

The king took the ring, and his memory came back to him

Hastinapura and wore himself out with the labours of kingship; but sleep left him, and night and day he thought only of Sankuntala. He mourned, too, for the loss of the child that she had promised to bear him; for his other queens were childless, and at his own death the great house of Hastinapura would die out.

One day Matali, Indra's messenger, came to Hastinapura and told Dushyanta that a race of giants, the offspring of the demon Kalanemi, had come to dwell in the forests of Hastinapura, and were killing the Brahmins and hindering their sacrifices to the gods. Dushyanta, delighted to get a change of scene, called for his chariot, his armour, and his bow and arrows, and drove into the forest with Matali.

Now Indra, at Menaka's prayer, had bidden Matali reunite Dushyanta with Sakuntala. After Dushyanta had fought and slain the race of giants in the forest, Matali took him in his chariot to Indra's court. There the great god greeted the hero and dismissed him. Matali returned with Dushyanta to earth, but made his chariot descend in the very wood where the sage Kanva had his hermitage. The king alighted, and, as he walked along, he saw a little boy, six years of age, who was playing with a lion cub and forcing its mouth open. Two maidens of the hermitage tried to stop him, but the boy took no heed, and, with the strength of a man rather than of a child, held down the cub and tore its

jaws apart. As Dushyanta looked at the boy, a great wave of love for him surged through his heart; he felt certain that the little lad must be his own son. And so he was—he was Prince Bharat, whom Sakuntala had borne to her faithless lord in Kanva's hermitage.

'Come here,' said Dushyanta to the little boy; 'I am your father.'

'You are not my father,' said the little prince scornfully. 'My father is King Dushyanta of Hastinapura. I do not know who you are.'

Just then Sakuntala came towards the group. Sorrow had lined her face and streaked her hair, tears had worn her cheeks; but she was still as beautiful as ever. The little prince, seeing her, cried: 'Mother, mother; there is a strange man who says he is my father. He isn't, is he?'

Sakuntala looked up and saw in front of her the splendid person of King Dushyanta. While she paused, wondering whether he knew her again or not, Dushyanta fell at her feet and said, 'Forgive me, my beloved, for my former neglect. Now I know you to be my bride, my Queen Sakuntala.'

'Rise, my king,' said Sakuntala, laughing and sobbing at the same time. 'But I see you have my ring on your finger! Where did you get it?'

Dushyanta told her the story and begged her to take it back.

'No,' said Sakuntala, 'I do not trust it. It slipped

off my finger once; it may do so again. Then you may perhaps forget me as you did before. Keep it with you, my king, and you will always have my image in your heart.'

Dushyanta did as Sakuntala bade him, and never again forgot his love for his beautiful forest-bride. He took her and the little prince back with him to Hastinapura, and there Bharat grew to be a hero even mightier than his father, a very king among men. When Dushyanta died, Bharat succeeded him on the throne of Hastinapura and became the greatest king that India had ever seen. For he conquered all India and gave it the name of Bharat Varsha, or Land of the Bharats, which it bears to this day. And his descendants were the great Bharata princes, whose wars and adventures were told by the sage Vaisampayan in the greatest book in all the world—the *Mahabharata*, or the Book of the Great Deeds of the Bharatas.

PURURAVAS AND URVASI

I

LONG ago, when the world was still young, the nymph Urvasi loved a mortal, Pururavas, the king of Pratishthan. Urvasi was, it is true, not an ordinary nymph, for she was created by man. It happened thus. Once two saints, Nara and Narayan, had by their asceticisms attained such merit that the god Indra sent Kama, the god of love, and Vasanta, the god of the spring, to win them from their holy life. But the saints were not so lightly led into evil. Narayan, who guessed the purpose for which Kama and Vasanta had come, took in his hand the stalk of a flower and placed it on his thigh. Instantly it turned into a nymph, fairer than any of those in Indra's heaven. The saint gave to the new-born nymph the name of Urvasi and bade the two gods take her back to Indra, to prove that saints who could, like him, create nymphs at will were not to be led astray by any of Indra's arts.

Urvasi went with Kama and Vasanta to Indra's heaven, Amravati, and the god made her immortal. One day, however, as she walked abroad with Rambha, Menaka and Chitralekha, three other lovely immortals, a demon named Kesi, the king

of the demon city of Hiranyapur, swooped down to the ground and bore away in his chariot Urvasi, the loveliest. Instantly the other nymphs raised such cries of grief and anger, that King Pururavas who was driving in his chariot, heard them. He asked them what had distressed them, and they told him what had befallen their friend. Hearing of Kesi's evil deed, King Pururavas drove furiously after him. Overtaking him, he shot an arrow through the demon's heart. Kesi fell dead to the ground, and Pururavas, lifting up the unconscious Urvasi, drove back with her to where Rambha, Menaka and Chitralekha awaited him on Mount Hemakuta.

When Urvasi opened her eyes and learnt that it was Pururavas who had rescued her from the demon Kesi's clutches, she looked at him with interest. When she saw his tall figure and his face lit with the divine beauty of his ancestor, the Sun-god, she fell deeply in love with him, mortal though he was. She was about to thank him when the noise of countless chariot-wheels was heard outside. Indra, learning of Urvasi's capture, had sent his Gandharvas, or immortal minstrels, led by their king, Chitraratha, to rescue her. On the way, King Chitraratha had learned that Pururavas had already accomplished the task, and he had hastened to Mount Hemakuta to thank the king and to carry back Urvasi to Amravati.

'In the name of Indra,' said King Chitraratha,

'I thank you; and I hail you as Indra's friend hereafter.'

'King,' replied Pururavas, 'you rate my deed too high. Had I not been fighting in the cause of the gods, I could never have overcome the monster Kesi.'

'It is well,' answered King Chitraratha with a smile. 'Your modesty becomes your worth. But I must take Urvasi back to Indra.'

Urvasi would willingly have stayed behind, but she could not. She bade Chitralekha thank the king for his gallant rescue, and, to gain another moment in his company, she let her dress catch on a straggling vine. While Chitralekha strove to disentangle it, Urvasi looked so fondly on Pururavas that the look set his heart on fire. He would have implored her to stay, but before he could say a word of what he felt, King Chitraratha's charioteer pressed Urvasi to mount the heavenly chariot. She entered it and it rose into the sky. As she ascended higher and higher, the unhappy Pururavas looked sadly after her.

But Urvasi, although she went back to Amravati and all the splendour of Indra's court, could not forget the handsome face of King Pururavas. At last she resolved to return to earth to see him once again and learn whether his thoughts ever dwelt on her, as hers did always on him. To this end she made Chitralekha her confidante, and both nymphs descended together from Amravati to the royal gardens in Pratishthan. They found Pururavas

walking sadly up and down his gardens, pouring into his friend Manava's ear endless praises of Urvasi's beauty, and bemoaning to him the ill fate that had made him love an immortal instead of some fair earthly maiden. Urvasi and Chitralekha, invisible to the king, listened to his sorrow. At last Urvasi said to her companion, 'I cannot bear to let him think that I am ungrateful or unfeeling. I shall write him a letter to tell him that I am as much in love with him as he is with me.' With these words Urvasi picked up a leaf and wrote on it the following lines:

> Thou wrongst me, lord, to think I do not feel
> Alike the pains that o'er thy bosom steal.
> The breeze that softly floats through heavenly
>   bowers,
> Reclined upon my couch of coral flowers,
> Sheds not on me its cool reviving breath,
> But blows the hot and scorching gale of death:
> O'er all my form the fevered venom flies,
> And each bright bud beneath me droops and dies.[1]

She then let the leaf fall close to Manava's feet. He picked it up and read it.

'Your case, my king,' said he to Pururavas, 'is not so hopeless as you thought. Look at these lines. Urvasi must have heard you lament, for she has sent you these lines to comfort you.'

Pururavas took the leaf, read it, and said, 'Yes,

[1] Translated by H. H. Wilson.

indeed, this is a message to comfort the deepest misery. But would that I could see the beautiful girl face to face and hear these words from her own lovely lips!'

At Urvasi's bidding, Chitralekha made herself visible to Pururavas.

'I greet you, fair lady,' said the king courteously; 'you are welcome. But had you brought with you Urvasi, you would have been more welcome still. The Ganges and the Jumna are beautiful rivers, but they are still more beautiful when they have joined together.'

'You despair too quickly, sir king,' said Chitralekha with a smile. 'I am the cloud and Urvasi is the lightning. It is therefore only right that I should precede her. I bring you her message. Once you saved her from Kesi's clutches. She wants you now to save her from those of Madan, the love-god.'

'Alas,' replied the king, 'a captive cannot help a captive. I am myself the prey of Urvasi's tormentor. If she could but see my heart, she would know what a storm of passion rages in it.'

'If that is so, Urvasi must show herself to you, face to face,' said Chitralekha. 'Come, Urvasi, make yourself visible to the king, for he suffers from the same ill as you.'

At these words. Urvasi made herself visible. 'Victory to the king,' she said to Pururavas.

'Such a wish from immortal lips is victory,' replied

Pururavas. Taking the lovely girl by the hand, he led her to a seat and would have sat beside her, but, just then, a messenger from Indra descended from Amravati.

'Come, Urvasi; come, Chitralekha,' he said. 'The lord of the heavens desires you to return at once. You have to act in Bharata's play. How could you leave Amravati to dawdle here? You must return at once or you will incur Indra's high displeasure.'

'Then we must go,' said Chitralekha. 'You would not wish us, O king, to provoke our master's wrath.'

'No,' said Pururavas sadly, 'I would not hold so impious a thought. Go, if you must; but cherish my memory in heaven.'

The two nymphs then entered the messenger's chariot and soon rose out of sight. Once again, Pururavas stood below, watching his beloved disappear in the heavens.

II

Although Urvasi returned to heaven, she could not drive King Pururavas from her thoughts: and this led her into sore trouble. On her return to Amravati she had to take part in the seer Bharata's play, known as 'Lakshmi's Choice of her Lord.' Indra himself honoured the actors and actresses by his presence. Yet, even so, Urvasi disgraced herself. When the time came for Lakshmi to make her choice, Menaka, as Varuni, addressed her thus:

Lakshmi, the mighty powers that rule the spheres
Are all assembled; at their head appears
The blooming Kesava.[1] Confess, to whom
Incline your heart?[2]

Urvasi, as Lakshmi, should have answered,
To Purushothama.[3]

But, instead of Purushothama, she said,
To Pururavas.

Bharata, the seer, was very angry indeed and cursed Urvasi.

'As you have forgotten your part,' he said, 'so you will be forgotten in heaven.' And he would have driven her out of Amravati for ever.

But Indra took pity on her. After the play was over, he saw her standing apart ashamed and disconsolate, and he remitted part of her punishment. As the sage had cursed her, she had to leave heaven, but her banishment should not be for ever. She might go to Pururavas and remain with him until the king beheld the son that she should bear him. Her exile would then be over and she would return forgiven.

In the meantime Pururavas was again grieving for the beautiful lady whom he loved and had lost, and was walking with his friend Manava, into whose kindly ear he was pouring out his woe. Suddenly his right arm began to throb, an excellent omen. Immediately afterwards Urvasi and Chitralekha

[1] Vishnu. Lakshmi is his queen.

[2] Translated by H. H. Wilson.

[3] Another name for Vishnu.

together descended in a heavenly car to earth. For a minute or two they listened to Pururavas' lament. Then, approaching gently behind him, Urvasi covered his eyes with her hands and bade him guess who the owner was.

The delighted king guessed that the soft, scented hands could be none other than those of Urvasi. He took her with him to a palace that he had in a beautiful wood, called the Gandhamadan wood. There, together, the king and the immortal spent nearly twelve months in perfect happiness. Unhappily, one day, as they wandered along the side of a lake, a water-nymph named Mandakini played on the surface, and drew for a moment the king's glance from the face of Urvasi beside him. His thoughtless act roused Urvasi's jealous anger, and she fled at once from his side, to hide her grief and anguish in some lonely coppice. As she ran, thinking only of her wrongs, she entered the thickest part of the wood.

Now it so happened that once Kartikeya, the son of Shiva and the god of war, had turned anchorite and had chosen this part of the wood as his hermitage. To guard himself from the lure of women's charms, he had laid a curse on the grove round him and ordained that any woman, divine or mortal, who entered it, should be turned into a tree or creeper. Although Kartịkeya had long left the hermitage, the curse that he had laid on the grove

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remained after him. Thus, when Urvasi entered the terrible wood, she suddenly felt her feet fasten to the ground. A moment later her beautiful form had changed into a clinging vine.

Pururavas followed the flying nymph, thinking that he would soon overtake her and soothe her anger with loving words and caresses. He sought everywhere, but could not find her. Then he became frantic with grief and implored the woods, the clouds, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the forest to help him to find Urvasi. At last, as he wandered, he saw a blood-red ruby of gigantic size lying on the ground. It was no ordinary ruby, but had sprung from the rosy feet of Shiva's queen, Parvati, and it alone had the power to overcome the curse of Kartikeya and turn Urvasi back from a vine into a beautiful woman. Indra, from the skies, had seen Pururavas' grief and had led his feet to where the ruby lay. Pururavas, distracted with his sorrow, would have passed it by unheeding. But as he wandered on, he heard a voice from the sky call to him: 'Pick up the gem, O king! With it in thy hand thou shalt recover thy queen!'

Pururavas could not disobey the heavenly voice. He picked up the mighty ruby and, with it in his hand, brushed past the vine that had once been Urvasi. The hand that carried the ruby touched one of the tendrils. In a moment the vine had vanished and Urvasi stood before the king. The

Urvasi changed into a clinging vine

two lovers embraced, and from Urvasi's loving lips the king learnt what had befallen her. Reconciled, they mounted a cloud, which Indra had sent to bear them home, and a few minutes later they were back once more in the king's palace at Pratishthan.

They had been home but a year or two when the king suffered a dreadful loss. He had treasured carefully the ruby that had brought him back his beautiful queen. He had wrapped it in a plantain leaf and had kept it among his wife's robes. Unhappily, one day, as her attendants were taking out the queen's dresses, a kite saw the ruby. Thinking it to be a piece of flesh, it flew off with it and was soon far out of range of Pururavas' arrows. While the king, deeply grieved, was lamenting the loss of the ruby that had brought him back Urvasi, the chamberlain came running to him with an arrow and a jewel in his hand. Some unknown person had shot down the kite and recovered the great ruby. The king asked impatiently who could have shot down the bird at so great a distance.

'I do not know,' answered the chamberlain, 'but if you look at the arrow, you will see something written. I am too blind to read the characters.'

The king read and then said, 'What does this mean? Listen. On the arrow is written: "The arrow of the all-subduing Ayus, the son of Urvasi and Pururavas." What can this be? If Urvasi bore me a son, why did she conceal his birth?'

Just then a messenger came to say that a saintly dame and a beautiful youth asked admittance. The king ordered them to be brought before him.

'Saintly lady,' he said, 'what brings you to our presence?'

'Hear me, O king,' she answered, 'and I will tell you. I am a servant of the great rishi, Chyavana, the son of Bhrigu. Fifteen years ago Urvasi secretly gave to me this youth, then a baby, and bade me bring him up unknown to you. I gave him all my love and Chyavana taught him all he knew, but now he must return. Today he killed a kite with his arrow and, since he has taken life, Chyavana will no longer permit him to stay in an anchorite's hermitage. Take then the boy; he is your son.'

'Send for Urvasi,' said the king. 'Come here, Ayus, if that be your name.'

The boy stepped shyly towards his father and prostrated himself at his feet. Pururavas raised him and embraced him. Then he seated him on a foot-stool near him. When Urvasi entered and saw her son at Pururavas' feet, she rushed to embrace him. Then she burst into tears.

'What ails you?' asked the king anxiously. 'Why weep when you have gained a son?'

'I do not weep for that,' answered Urvasi. 'I weep because, in gaining a son, I lose both him and my husband. When Indra banished me from Amravati, he told me that I should stay with you

until you saw the son that I should bear you. Then I must return to Amravati. That was why I hid the child in Chyavana's hermitage. That is why I weep now.'

'If you leave me,' said Pururavas sadly, 'I shall not linger after you in Pratishthan. I shall give Ayus my throne and wander as an anchorite in the woods until death overtakes me.'

He was about to resign his throne when a sudden splendour lit up the sky and the beautiful Narada, his golden locks shining in the sun, descended before them. All rose to greet and do homage to the sage. The king asked him why he had come so suddenly to honour his court.

'May your days be many,' answered Narada. 'I have come as Indra's messenger. He bade Urvasi return on the day that you looked upon her son, but he has seen your love for her and he has pitied you. He now desires that she may stay with you as long as you live. The demons are still unsubdued and Indra will have need of your valiant arms. Remain, therefore, a king and make prince Ayus your successor.'

As Narada spoke, Rambha, Menaka, Chitralekha, and other nymphs came down from heaven. They carried a golden ewer filled with Ganges water, and a throne, which they placed a little lower than that of King Pururavas. With the Ganges water Narada anointed Ayus as partner of his

father's kingdom. Then, leaving Pururavas and Urvasi happy together until death should part them, Narada of the golden curls, together with his heavenly train, returned to Amravati, where the god Indra had his court.

MALATI AND MADHAVA

ONCE upon a time in Padmavati, or Ujjain, there lived one Bhurivasu, the wise and greatly-honoured minister of the king. At the same time there lived in Kundinapura one Devarata, the no less wise and honoured minister of the king of Vidharba. The two had in boyhood been close friends. So when their wives presented the one with a lovely little baby girl, Malati, and the other with a no less beautiful baby boy, Madhava, the two friends promised each other that when the children grew up they should be married. To witness the pledge, they called a famous Buddhist abbess, named Kamandaki, and her pupil, Saudhamini.

Eighteen years passed by, and the girl and boy were ripe for wedlock. But time often brings to nought the most sacred pledges. So Devarata was unwilling to force on Bhurivasu a marriage that might be hateful both to Malati and Madhava. Therefore, without telling him his real motive, Devarata sent Madhava to Ujjain. There he was to learn all the wisdom, taught by the divine Buddha, from the lips of the wise abbess, Kamandaki. To Kamandaki he sent a secret message, begging her to help, so far as she could, the marriage of his son with Bhurivasu's daughter.

Kamandaki welcomed the young man; her heart warmed towards him, and right gladly she bent herself to the task of wedding him to Malati. Nor would the task have been hard; for Malati was also her pupil. Unhappily, just before Madhava's coming, the king's favourite, Nandana, a man of mature years and harsh features, had cast his eyes on Malati and had thought her fair. He asked the king, his master, for her hand. The king asked it of Bhurivasu. The minister, too timid to refuse the king's request, answered feebly, 'My lord, Malati is your daughter.'

The king, deeming that Bhurivasu had consented, approved the match. When Madhava came to Ujjain, men were already making ready for the marriage. Still Kamandaki did not despair. Knowing that Malati would go with her attendants at dawn to the temple of Madandev, to worship the god of love and laughter, she one day bade Madhava go there, and from a safe hiding-place see the beauties of the city pass by. Madhava went at dawn to the gardens round the temple and, resting under a tree, amused his idle fingers by weaving a garland of *vakula* blossoms. He had hardly finished when he saw Maltai come out of the temple. She had reached the temple earlier even than he had, and, after making fit offerings at the love-god's shrine, she walked through the garden, radiant with youth and beauty. As she passed Madhava, she turned

towards him and their eyes met. Madhava at once fell in love with the fair girl, but doubted whether he had roused any feelings in her heart. She passed on and Madhava fell into deep despair.

Suddenly a voice at his elbow roused him. Looking up, he saw beside him a pretty face which laughed into his own.

'Pray, fair sir,' said the damsel, with eyes twinkling, 'you have woven a beautiful wreath of just the flowers my foster-sister loves. Could you not let me give it to her? She would value the gift so much. Her name is Malati: she is the daughter of Bhurivasu, the minister. Mine, fair sir, is Lavangika, and I am her foster-sister.'

The youth looked down at the wreath, then up at the pretty face near him. Then he let his eyes wander round the temple garden. Standing near the gate was Malati, with her eyes fixed intently on the pair. Her face coloured and her eyes fell when she met Madhava's glance. The young man, now sure that Malati had noticed him, willingly gave the wreath to Lavangika, who bore it to Malati. She, to Madhava's delight, took it and hid it in her clothes. He did not strive to follow Malati. He knew that to do so would have angered her. So he sat on in the shade of the tree, thinking of his adventure and above all of the beautiful girl whom he had just seen. As he sat, there came to him his friend Makaranda, to whom, in reply to his

friend's questions, he told all that had happened that morning.

'She is more beautiful,' cried Madhava to his friend, 'than the opening bud. Her face is as fair as the moonbeam. Her eyes are like the lotus-flower. I shall never be happy unless she becomes my wife.'

'But that can never be,' replied Makaranda. 'If, as you say, she is Malati, Bhurivasu's daughter, she is betrothed to the king's favourite, Nandana. Still, she would not have sent her foster-sister for the wreath,' he added soothingly, 'had she not felt for you more than a passing fancy.'

'I cannot live without her,' replied Madhava sadly.

Just then Madhava's servant, Kalahamsa, came up, showed a picture to Makaranda and said:

'Young sir, look at this picture.'

'Why, it is the likeness of Madhava,' cried Makaranda, and showed it to his friend. Then, turning to Kalahamsa, he said, 'But who drew it?'

'The lady who has stolen his heart,' laughed Kalahamsa, with the freedom of an old servant; 'at least I judge so from what I overheard my master say to you.'

'But how did you come by it?' asked Makaranda, more and more puzzled.

'I had it from Mandarika, the maidservant of the abbess Kamandaki. Malati showed it to

Lavangika, her foster-sister. She lent it to Mandarika, who has just lent it to me.'

'There is but one thing for you to do,' said Makaranda to Madhava. 'That is to draw her portrait and convey it to her by the same hands as brought this to you.'

'But I do not draw well,' objected Madhava.

'Nay,' said Makaranda, smiling, 'you have a skilful pencil and love will guide it.'

Madhava had with him a pencil and drawing-book, because he often sketched the fresh scenes of Ujjain; and he now began to draw.

Makaranda waited a few minutes. Then, looking over his shoulder, he cried, 'Why, it is Malati to the life!'

He took the picture and hastily scribbled a verse on its back:

> Whatever nature's loveliness displays
> May seem to others beautiful and bright;
> But since these charms have burst upon my gaze,
> They form my life's sole exquisite delight.[1]

Just then the maidservant Mandarika ran up to Kalahamsa, and asked for Malati's picture of Madhava. Kalahamsa gave her instead Madhava's picture of Malati. She gave a start of surprise and asked the meaning of the change of pictures. They then let her into the secret. She, in turn, told them that from her lattice window Malati, unseen, had

[1] Translated by H. H. Wilson

often gazed with loving eyes on Madhava. She then readily agreed to give the picture of Malati to Lavangika who would convey it to Malati.

Madhava and Makaranda returned home. Mandarika took the picture to Lavangika who, overjoyed at Madhava's skill, showed it to her foster-sister. Malati was eagerly looking at it and reading the lines written on the back when the abbess Kamandaki asked for admittance. After exchanging courtesies she began to talk of the beauty and wisdom of Devarata's son, Madhava, and spoke bitterly of Bhurivasu's cruelty in betrothing his daughter to the old and ugly Nandana, even though he was the king's favourite. In this way she firmly fastened Malati's thoughts on the person of Madhava.

When the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month came, the abbess thought it was time to arrange another meeting for the lovers. She told Malati that she ought to pick some flowers and strew them on the shrine of the god Shiva. At the same time she gave Madhava a hint that if he went to the garden round the temple he would probably again see his beloved, if only for the last time. Malati, ignorant of the abbess's scheme, filled a basket with wild flowers and went with them to Shiva's temple. Madhava had hidden himself in the bushes to watch for her coming. At last he saw her. He would have stepped out to greet

her, but Kamandaki, unseen by Malati, made a sign to him to stay concealed. Her wish was that he should hear Malati's own lips declare that she loved him. She then led Malati close to where Madhava was hidden, and began to praise Madhava, his talents and his beauty, until at last with faltering lips Malati confessed that she loved him with all her heart.

Just then a man came running up. 'Save yourselves! Save yourselves!' he cried. 'A tiger, sacred to Shiva and caged in the porch of the temple, has broken out. It has already killed several people and is rushing here.'

Next, one of the abbess's pupils came running up, crying, 'Help, help! The tiger has singled out Madayantika, Malati's friend and Nandana's sister and is chasing her!'

Madhava at once rushed out of his hiding-place to save his beloved's friend. But already Madhava's comrade, Makaranda, who had come in search of him, had rushed up and had attacked the tiger. Both young men fell on the raging beast and killed it with their swords. But both were wounded and fell fainting to the ground. Malati in her grief lost all her fears and kissed Madhava's forehead. When his senses returned, he found his head pillowed in his beloved's lap. Kamandaki had thus achieved her aim, which was to extract from youth and maid a mutual confession of their love.

But Madayantika, saved by Makaranda's courage, had also fallen in love with her preserver. Thus Kamandaki unwittingly had brought about two love affairs instead of one.

Still, to love each other was not enough. Malati was betrothed to Nandana, and the King, having promised the maid to his favourite, would never break his promise.

Madhava, despairing of divine or human help, thought that he would bring to his aid the demons that haunted the burning-ground of Ujjain.

It was a dark, horrible night, and Madhava, brave though he was, felt a moment of fear as he stepped into the burning-ground. In his hands he had a lump of raw, bleeding flesh. With it he meant to buy the help of the ghosts and vampires that haunted the spot. As he walked, he heard their hideous cries and shrieks; for, smelling the meat, they flocked round him. Chattering and screaming, they tried to tear the meat from his hands; but Madhava held on to it firmly, for with it he meant to buy their aid. He meant not to stop until he had reached the very centre of the burning-ground.

Suddenly Madhava heard, from the temple of the terrible man-eating goddess Chamundi,[1] the voice of Malati calling for help. He dropped the raw flesh on the ground, and drawing his sword he ran to the temple. He was just in time to snatch the

[1] Another name for Kali.

fainting girl from one Aghoraghanta, who with uplifted knife was about to offer her to the terrible deity of whom he was the priest.

Madhava ran with Malati out of the temple, pursued by the priest. Once outside, he made Malati flee for her life while he fought Aghoraghanta. The priest was mad with fury at the escape of his victim. He drew his sword and rushed at Madhava, but the youth was as skilled a swordsman as he was brave. He soon ran Aghoraghanta through the body and left him lifeless by the door of his own temple.

Madhava had rescued Malati, but he was no nearer marrying her. He could no longer buy the help of the vampires and ghosts of the burning-ground, for they had devoured the raw meat which he had brought for them. He went home sadly, as far as ever from winning his beloved.

Next day Madhava learnt that Malati was about to implore the blessing of the city goddess, and in her presence don the wedding dress sent her by the king for her wedding with Nandana. Malati had no heart for this but, as a betrothed maiden, she had to do it. Madhava told Makaranda, and at once his gallant friend thought of a plan. By it not only might Madhava win Malati, but Makaranda also might win Madayantika, whom he had loved ever since the day he had saved her from the tiger.

The plan was this. When Malati came to the

temple, Madhava would carry her off, and Makaranda would take her place, as a bride, in Nandana's home. The plan could only succeed with the aid of Malati's foster-sister, Lavangika; but that aid Makaranda obtained through the help of the abbess Kamandaki.

In pursuance of Makaranda's plan, he and Madhava, by bribing the priests of the temple, got leave to hide behind the image of the city goddess. All unconscious of the plot to save her, Malati rode up on her elephant. At the temple door the elephant knelt, and Malati and Lavangika alighted. With slow, sad footsteps Malati walked up the temple hall to the shrine. There she stood crying, while Lavangika offered on her behalf flowers and incense to invoke the goddess' blessings. At last Malati could bear it no longer.

'Of what use,' she asked Lavangika, 'of what use are all these flowers and incense? I am to marry the hateful Nandana, when I love Madhava. How can I ever be happy, even though the goddess showers on me a hundred blessings?'

Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into a fit of passionate weeping. This was a chance such as Lavangika wished for. She beckoned to Madhava to take her place by Malati. As he did so, she took Malati's wedding dress to Makaranda, who rapidly put it on. So fair was his skin and so delicate were his features that in Malati's wedding dress he

looked as blooming a bride as any bridegroom might desire.

'How I hate the wedding dress you carry!' cried poor Malati, without looking up. 'I will never put it on. I will kill myself tonight. But, dear Lavangika, give Madhava, as my farewell present, the garland that he wove in Kamandaki's garden.'

With these words she took the garland from her own neck and flung it round the neck of Madhava, who stood beside her. Then for the first time she saw that he had taken Lavangika's place. When poor Malati saw the error she had made, she was overcome with shame. She called for Lavangika. But the abbess Kamandaki came up, took her hand and, soothing her, placed it in Madhava's. She then told the youth and the maid how they had been betrothed as children, and led them to her garden. There everything was ready for their marriage, and Kamandaki did not leave them until they had been duly wedded.

But Makaranda had to play the part of a bride, and right well he did it. Next day with veiled face he went through the marriage ceremony. When night fell, Nandana went to his bride's chamber to look on her unveiled charms. Makaranda pretended to be shy until at last the impatient Nandana tried by force to embrace his fancied bride. Then Maka-

randa pushed him away with such violence that he fell over backwards.

In a fury, Nandana left his house, abusing Makaranda for a shameless wanton. He went to his sister Madayantika, and begged her to take his bride to task and teach her better manners. Madayantika was very angry when she heard how her brother had been treated. She fetched Lavangika, and went with her to give her friend Malati a good scolding.

Lavangika, of course, was in the secret, and meant to leave Madayantika in Makaranda's arms. As they went to the bridal chamber, Lavangika began to talk of that terrible day when the tiger escaped and would have killed Madayantika, had Makaranda not slain it. Madayantika, thinking Makaranda far away, owned her love and gratitude towards her gallant saviour.

'But,' she added sadly, 'I do not think that I shall ever see him again.'

'Still, suppose, Madayantika,' said Lavangika, 'suppose you should chance to see him, what would you do?'

'I should never cease to gaze on him in the hope that he might bestow on me a look in return.'

'And suppose,' said Lavangika, 'he loved you and tried to carry you off, as Krishna carried off Rukmani, what would you do then?'

'Why ask me?' said Madayantika earnestly. 'He

bought my life when he risked his own to save me. I am his for the asking.'

By this time they had come close to the bridal couch. On it was a woman's form asleep, or at least so it seemed.

'Are you asleep, Malati?' said Madayantika. As she spoke, she put her hand close to Makaranda's. He instantly caught it, pulled Madayantika to him and clasped her to his bosom.

'But who is this?' cried Madayantika to Lavangika. 'Save me, save me! It is some man and not Malati at all.'

'It is someone you love better still,' laughed Lavangika in reply. Then, lifting up the girl's chin, she said, 'Look at him and see who he is.' Madayantika looked and when she saw it was Makaranda she burst into tears and sank into her lover's arms.

'Come, come,' said Lavangika after a minute or two, 'we must flee and join Malati and Madhava in their hiding-place. Let us take off our bangles, for fear they may tinkle as we walk and betray us.'

Madhava had led Malati away to a marble platform overlooking a lake, and there they were sitting, looking at the still water and exchanging glances. On Malati's neck hung once more the garland of flowers that Madhava had woven in the love-god's garden. Suddenly Lavangika and Madayantika, with

Kalahamsa, Madhava's servant, came rushing to them.

'Help, help, young sir!' cried Lavangika. 'Your gallant friend, Makaranda, to whose aid you owe Malati, has been stopped. Nandana sent the city guards after him. He is alone, and he is fighting with them.'

'Are you armed, Kalahamsa?' cried Madhava. 'Yes? Well, come with me and help Makaranda.'

With these words, Madhava ran off with naked blade, followed by Kalahamsa. Soon they were fighting desperately by Makaranda's side against the city guards. After a fierce struggle the guards fled.

As the three were returning to Malati and Madayantika in triumph a royal messenger came and told them to present themselves before the king. In the royal presence they found Nandana and Bhurivasu, furious at the trick Makaranda had played. But the king smiled at it, and said lightly to Bhurivasu, 'Why, such men as these are the very men I need for my state!'

Nandana was angry at the king's words, but through fear he bit his lip and kept silence. Bhurivasu, whose anger was not real rejoiced at them.

The king then dismissed the two young men, and they went away, light at heart, to the maidens whom they loved. Kalahamsa, Madhava's servant, ran ahead to announce the arrival of the two youths, and found Madayantika and Lavangika searching

everywhere for Malati. Kalahamsa joined in the search, and shortly afterwards there came Madhava and Makaranda.

'Where is Malati?' cried Madhava to Madayantika.

'I do not know,' she answered sadly; 'anxious for your return, she left us to watch for you down the road. Since then I have not seen her.'

'Then she is lost,' said Madhava. 'Some vile priest of Chamundi has borne her away to avenge the death of Aghoraghanta.'

What Madhava feared had in truth happened. Kapalakundala, a pupil of Aghoraghanta and a priestess of Chamundi, had carried off the helpless Malati. Following her victim from a distance, she had waited until she was alone. Then, seizing her, she had borne her away to suffer a death of torture. Through his grief, Madhava was in danger of losing his reason. With Makaranda to protect him, he strayed aimlessly through the forest, calling on the clouds, the trees, the flowers, the running streams, to say whether they had seen Malati.

Madayantika and Lavangika were no less grieved at the loss of the beautiful girl whom both loved so much. They went to the abbess Kamandaki, told her everything, and implored her aid. Kamandaki was as distressed as they were, for she had contrived the meetings of Malati and Madhava that had ended

in their mutual love. But she was at her wit's end how to help them.

At last she cried, 'I have it! I had a pupil once, named Saudhamini; but she has far surpassed her teacher. By her penances and her austerities she has won for herself supernatural powers. I will ask her aid.'

Straightway she went to Saudhamini's dwelling, told her Malati's story, and begged her to help the young lovers. Saudhamini gladly promised her assistance and, springing into the air, went in pursuit of the hideous Kapalakundala.

Saudhamini overtook Kapalakundala among the Vindhya mountains, near the temple of Chamundi wherein she meant to sacrifice Malati. She snatched the fainting girl from her clutches and brought her back to a woodland hut near Ujjain. Then she set out to seek for Madhava and Makaranda. She found Madhava nearly dead, and Makaranda about to throw himself from a precipice into a torrent that roared and foamed several hundred feet below. Placing her hand on his arm, she said:

'Stay, rash youth. Do not throw yourself over the precipice until you are sure that Malati is dead. See, I have with me her garland.'

With these words she showed the delighted Makaranda the same garland, now dry and withered, that Madhava had given Malati in the love-god's garden.

'This is news too good to be true,' answered Makaranda. 'Come with me and tell Madhava. Such news will prove the best of medicines.'

Together Saudhamini and Makaranda went to where Madhava lay unconscious. Placing the garland in Madhava's hands, Saudhamini said:

'Arise, fair youth, Malati is not dead. She is alive and close at hand.'

Madhava opened his eyes, saw the garland, and at once recognized it. He first fainted with joy, but when Makaranda had fanned him, he revived and sprang to his feet.

'Come with me,' said Saudhamini, and led him to the hut wherein Malati lay asleep.

It was not long before the lovers were in each other's arms.

Her task finished, Saudhamini went with Makaranda to seek for Madayantika and Lavangika, and found them almost as distressed as Madhava had been. The news of Malati's recovery, however, revived them as it had revived Madhava and Makaranda.

As the united lovers were telling each other the tale of their adventures, a messenger from the king came up to them.

'Is young Madhava here?' asked the messenger. 'I have in vain searched for him all over Ujjain town and I have followed him here. I have a letter for him from the king.'

'Yes, I am here,' said Madhava with a smile. 'Give me the letter.'

He opened it and read:

'To all, greeting! The king is pleased to give his royal assent to the marriage of Madhava and Malati.'

'How gracious is the king,' cried Madhava and Malati in a single breath. 'But how came he to write this?' asked Madhava of the messenger.

'It seems, young sir,' replied the messenger, 'that he was pleased with the valour of yourself and your friend, when you fought the city guards. Also he has never ceased to laugh at the trick played by Makaranda on Nandana. He has therefore pressed Nandana to give up his rights over Malati, promising to find him a fairer and more richly dowered bride elsewhere.'

'That is impossible!' cried Madhava.

'I do not doubt it,' said the royal messenger courteously; 'but these were the king's words and Nandana had therefore to yield to the king's wishes. Bhurivasu agreed readily enough to the marriage. Now, young sir, with your leave I must return to my royal master. Farewell!'

'Farewell!' said Madhava. Then, turning to Kamandaki, he said, 'Lady, how can I thank you enough for all your help?'

'There is one way, my son,' answered Kamandaki. 'Prove a good husband to my beloved Malati and you will more than repay me.'

'That is the easiest of all ways,' said Madhava, taking Malati in his arms.

Following so excellent an example, Makaranda took Madayantika in his arms also; and the abbess, pleading an excuse, left the lovers to find by themselves their way home.

THE TOY CART

ONCE upon a time there lived in Ujjain a wicked king called Palaka who paid no heed to the laws of God and gave no honour to the Brahmins. So evil had he become that his subjects prayed often that someone would overthrow his throne. At last a holy man prophesied that one Aryaka, a cowherd of giant strength and stature, would achieve that for which all in the kingdom longed. At first it did not seem as if the prophecy could come true, for directly Palaka heard of it he sent his guards to seize Aryaka and fling him into prison.

At the time that King Palaka ruled in Ujjain there dwelt in that town a most generous and handsome Brahmin, named Charudatta, and a lovely dancing-girl, called Vasantasena. Indeed, such were the latter's beauty and her skill in her art that her fame had spread far and wide, and the townspeople thought her the greatest glory of their city.

One day Charudatta met Vasantasena in the gardens of the temple of Kamadeva, the god of love; and no sooner had the two met than they instantly fell in love with each other. Charudatta would willingly have wooed Vasantasena and made her his wife, but so open-handed had he been that he had given away to holy men and beggars the great riches that

he had once owned. He was therefore poor while Vasantasena was rich, and he was too proud to live on a rich wife's bounty.

But Vasantasena thought the opposite, and she would gladly have given Charudatta all her wealth to win him for a husband. To gain her wish she thought of a device. One rainy evening she took with her a casket of jewels and went towards Charudatta's home. She meant to tell him that she was afraid that thieves might break into her house and take her jewels, and to beg him to keep them for her.

Unhappily, on the way, Vasantasena met Sansthanika, the brother-in-law of King Palaka. He had great power, but he was a wicked man and used his power for evil. Directly he saw Vasantasena alone on the road, he tried to seize her and drag her to his home. With great skill Vasantasena slipped from his grasp, and ran as hard as she could towards Charudatta's house. She reached it just as Charudatta, having ended his evening worship, was about to send his servant, Maitreya, to offer outside the house a handful of rice to the household gods. As Maitreya opened the door, unseen by Charudatta and Sansthanika, Vasantasena slipped inside the house. Sansthanika, searching for her in vain outside the house, guessed that she must be inside, and sent a haughty note to Charudatta ordering him to hand her over.

'A mere dancing-girl,' he wrote, 'has fled and has

taken refuge in your house. If you will give her up you will be rewarded by me fairly. If you refuse, you become my eternal enemy.'

Charudatta, on reading the note, learnt for the first time that the beautiful girl whom he loved was inside his house. In spite of the great influence Sansthanika had over King Palaka, Charudatta was far too noble to win his favour or escape his hatred by handing her over, so he gave the prince's messenger no answer. He welcomed Vasantasena and thanked her for trusting herself to his protection.

'Then,' said Vasantasena, 'if you are not displeased with me, let me trust in you still more. Keep for me this casket of jewels. I was beset by robbers on the way here, and they may be waiting for me outside. If you keep the jewels, I shall know them to be safe.'

'Certainly, fair lady,' answered Charudatta, 'I will keep your jewels until such time as you need them. But my men and I will see you home.'

With these words he and all his menservants armed themselves and led Vasantasena safely past Sansthanika. As the latter had only two servants with him and Charudatta a great number, he did not dare try to seize her. Muttering threats of vengeance, he let them pass, and Charudatta brought Vasantasena safely to her house.

On Charudatta's return home, he entrusted Vasantasena's jewel casket to two of his servants.

Vardhamana was to guard it by day and Maitreya by night.

Now it so happened that a Brahmin, named Sarvilaka, deeply loved a beautiful pupil of Vasantasena, called Madanika. Madanika loved him in return, but she was Vasantasena's slave. Without her freedom, she could not marry Sarvilaka. Sarvilaka had not the means with which to buy Madanika's liberty. At last, mad with passion, he plotted to rob some rich citizen's house and with its plunder buy Madanika from Vasantasena. He did not know that Charudatta had given away all his riches. All he knew was that he lived in a big house. Supposing him to be rich, Sarvilaka broke into his house by making a hole in the wall. Inside, Maitreya lay asleep, Vasantasena's casket in his hand. Softly Sarvilaka took it from him, leaving him still sleeping, and withdrew as he had come.

Next morning, when Charudatta's household awoke, the casket was nowhere to be seen. But the hole in the wall showed that a thief had taken it. Charudatta was in despair. Rather than let Vasantasena think he had taken it himself, he sent her, by Maitreya, a lovely necklace, the last jewel left in his house. With the necklace, he sent a message that he had pawned her casket to raise money to gamble with and that the man to whom he had pledged it had fled.

In the meantime, however, Sarvilaka had gone

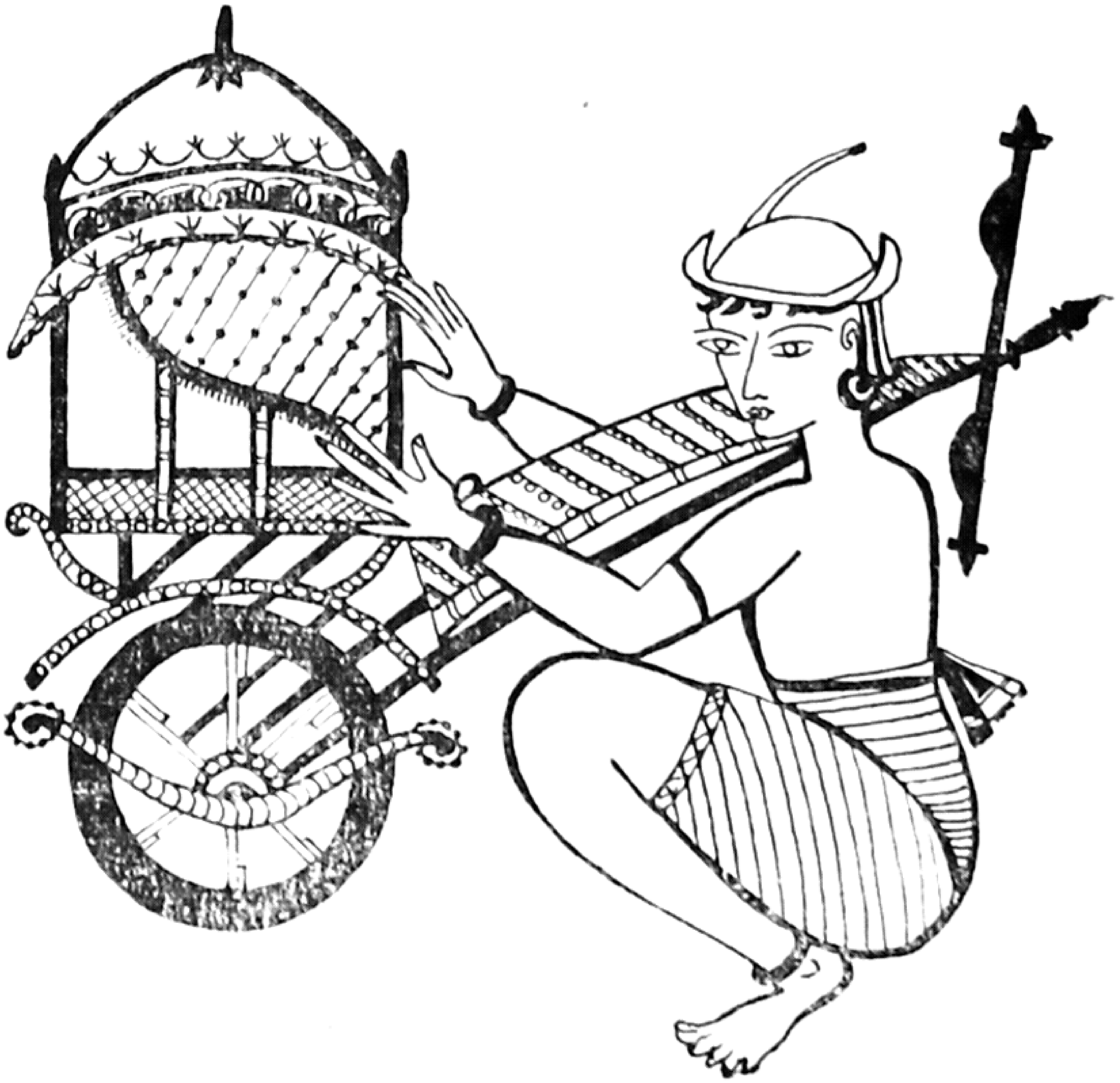
to Madanika and shown her the casket by which he meant to buy her freedom. Madanika at once recognized it as Vasantasena's. Vasantasena overheard the two talking, and when she learnt what Sarvilaka had done for Madanika, she gave her to him as a gift. Then she resolved to tease Charudatta by telling him a story similar to his own. She went herself to Charudatta's house and said, 'Charudatta, tell me the value of your necklace, for I pledged it at play and the keeper of the tables has run away with it. In the meantime please accept, in place of it, this golden casket.'

So saying, she gave Charudatta back the golden casket, stolen by Sarvilaka. As he put out his hand to take it she fell into his arms.

Next day Charudatta went from his house early, leaving word to Vasantasena to follow. While she was dressing, Rohasena, Charudatta's five-year-old son by a former marriage, entered her room weeping. The child of a rich neighbour had that day received as a gift a toy cart, all of gold. Rohasena had asked for a similar toy, but all his nurse could do was to make him a toy cart of clay. Rohasena was so unhappy at this that he ran crying into Vasantasena's room. Vasantasena gave the nurse some jewels with which to buy a gold toy cart for Rohasena, and then went to get into the litter that would take her to Charudatta.

Unhappily, by great ill fortune, she got into the

wrong litter. It so chanced that Sansthanika's servant, Sthavaraka, was driving his master's bullock cart past Charudatta's door. Charudatta's driver, on the other hand, had taken his cart to the back of



The toy cart

the house, to fetch some more cushions. So Vasantasena, not knowing Charudatta's cart by sight, slipped by mistake into Sansthanika's bullock cart and was driven by Sthavaraka to his master's garden.

When Sthavaraka had driven Vasantasena away, Charudatta's cart returned to the front of the house. As it waited for Vasantasena, there crept into it the cowherd Aryaka who had been imprisoned by King Palaka as a pretender to his throne. He had just killed his jailor and escaped from prison. Pursued by the king's guards, he sought and found refuge in Charudatta's cart. Charudatta's coachman, thinking Vasantasena had entered the cart drove to where Charudatta awaited Vasantasena in a flower garden. Charudatta opened the cart door for Vasantasena to alight. But Aryaka stepped out instead, and threw himself as a suppliant at Charudatta's feet.

'Rise,' said Charudatta, 'I cannot betray one who comes to me as a suppliant, even if I thereby lose my life.'

'Pardon me, Charudatta,' replied Aryaka. 'Pardon me for entering your cart without leave.'

'Nay, Aryaka,' answered Charudatta, 'your use of my cart was an act of courtesy to me.'

Then, turning to his servant Vardhamana, he said, 'Strike off his chains.'

Aryaka had freed his hands, but fetters still bound his ankles. These Vardhamana struck off at his master's bidding.

'Now you are free,' said Charudatta.

'Nay,' replied Aryaka, 'you have bound me by still firmer chains to yourself.'

Charudatta bowed and said, 'The king's guards will be here directly. Flee hence as swiftly as you can.'

'Farewell, then, noble Charudatta,' said Aryaka. 'Farewell. Perhaps we may meet again. I shall gather round me a band, and either drive the wicked Palaka from his throne or perish in the attempt.'

While Aryaka was fleeing in Charudatta's cart, Sthavaraka brought Vasantasena to Sansthanika's door. Sansthanika, thinking that Vasantasena had come of her own free will, was at first overjoyed and treated her with every courtesy. But when he learned from her own lips that she hated and despised him but loved Charudatta, his love turned to a fury of rage. He first ordered his servants to kill her. When they from pity refused, he rushed at her and strangled her. Then he covered her body with leaves and imprisoned his servants, so that they should not give evidence against him.

This done, Sansthanika went to the court of justice and laid a complaint against Charudatta, that he had killed Vasantasena. There was no evidence against Charudatta, but the judges feared the power of the king and they knew the favour shown by him to his brother-in-law. Nevertheless, even so, they might have let Charudatta go free, had not his servant, Maitreya, by chance entered the court to witness his master's trial. He had in his hands the jewels that Vasantasena had given Rohasena's nurse in order to buy the boy a toy cart of gold. Charudatta

had refused to accept her present, and told his servant to return it. Maitreya tried to say a word on his master's behalf, but Sansthanika bade him be silent and struck him. As Maitreya reeled under the blow, Vasantasena's jewels dropped from his hands.

Sansthanika picked them up with a cry of joy. 'Here are poor Vasantasena's jewels,' he said. 'See, Charudatta gave them to his servant Maitreya to sell.'

'Whose are these jewels?' the judges asked Charudatta.

'They are Vasantasena's,' replied Charudatta.

'No more evidence is needed,' said the chief of the judges. 'Charudatta is guilty of the murder of Vasantasena. Had he been an ordinary man, we should have sentenced him to death. But, as he is a Brahmin, the king alone can sentence him. Officer,' he added, turning to one of the guards, 'put the case before the king and tell him that Charudatta has been found guilty of murder. But as he is a Brahmin, the laws of Manu forbid his execution. At most, he may be exiled from the kingdom.'

The officer took the message to the king. Meanwhile the wicked Palaka, not heeding the judge's counsel, directed that Vasantasena's ornaments should be hung round the prisoner's neck and that, in spite of his priestly caste, he should be dragged round the city, with drummers proclaiming his

crime. He should thereafter be impaled in the burning-ground to the south of Ujjain.

The chandalas, or low-caste executioners, seized Charudatta and dragged him round the city, proclaiming him everywhere to be a murderer. 'This is Charudatta, son of Sagardatta, by whom the dancing girl Vasantasena has been robbed and murdered. He has been convicted and condemned to death, and we are ordered by King Palaka to put him to death. So will His Majesty ever punish those who commit crimes hateful alike to earth and heaven!'

The executioners, being kind men, went as slowly as they could, hoping against hope that a reprieve would come.

One Chandala said, 'When my father was about to depart to heaven, he said to me, "Son, whenever you have a condemned man to execute, go slowly. Never act in haste. Perhaps some kind, rich man may buy the criminal's freedom; for a son may be born to the raja and a pardon proclaimed; or an elephant may break loose and in the confusion the culprit may escape; or perhaps there may be a new king and he may set free all prisoners." '

Slowly as the Chandalas went, yet at last they reached the burning-ground where they had to impale Charudatta. Just as they were about to kill him, Vasantasena broke through the crowd, and, throwing herself on Charudatta's neck, proclaimed his innocence and Sansthanika's guilt. The Chan-

dalas sent word to the king and asked for his orders. As they waited, Vasantasena told Charudatta and the crowd her story:

'After that wicked Sansthanika seized me by the throat and flung me to the ground, I was conscious of nothing. I awoke to see a Buddhist mendicant bending over me. He was by good fortune passing that way, and had heard my hand move under the leaves with which Sansthanika had covered my body. He was a kind man and at once pulled me out. Then, throwing water on my face, he revived me. When I opened my eyes, he recognized me as one who, before he became a mendicant, had helped him in trouble. In his gratitude, he lifted me to my feet and made me lean on him while I walked homewards. I was very weak because of what I had suffered. The road led me past this spot, and, seeing a crowd, I asked the mendicant to go and inquire the cause. He returned with the terrible news that Charudatta was about to be put to death for murdering me. In a moment my weakness vanished. Heaven seemed to send me wings to fly across the dividing space, so that I reached his side just in time to save him.'

As Vasantasena finished speaking, another and a larger crowd burst out of the city. They raised shouts of joy and victory. In their midst was Sansthanika, with hands bound behind his back.

'Glory to Shiva! Glory to Kartikeya! Glory

to Aryaka! Glory to the spoiler of foes, the world-conqueror!' shouted the crowd. At the head of it danced Sarvilaka, the thief who had robbed Charudatta of Vasantasena's jewels in order to win Madanika, her slave and pupil. He told Madanika that he could not wed her until he had earned Vasantasena's pardon. When Vasantasena had pardoned him, he had joined Aryaka and with him raised a band of devoted soldiers. Aryaka had surprised the garrison, seized Ujjain, and, in the fighting, Sarvilaka had killed the wicked King Palaka in single combat.

'With this hand I have killed the evil Palaka!' cried Sarvilaka. 'In his place, as the Brahmin foretold, the gallant Aryaka has mounted the throne. Now we will release Charudatta, who helped Aryaka to flee; and Sansthanika shall suffer whatever penalty Charudatta shall order.'

As Sarvilaka spoke, the crowd dragged Sansthanika close to Charudatta. All Sansthanika's insolence and cruelty had gone. The wretched man's sole thought now was how he might save his life. He threw himself at the feet of the man whom he had falsely charged, and cried, 'Save me, Charudatta! Save me!'

'Nay, nay,' cried Sarvilaka. 'Tell us quickly, Charudatta, what punishment we shall inflict? Shall we saw him in two, impale him, or tie him up and loose wild beasts upon him?'

'Save me, Charudatta! Save me!' cried the miserable Sansthanika.

'How can you expect mercy from me?' said Charudatta sternly. Then, turning to the mob, he asked, 'Will you promise to inflict on this villain any punishment, no matter how severe?'

'Yes, yes,' shouted the mob. 'What shall it be? Burn him alive? Impale him? Saw him in two?'

'Very well,' said Charudatta in the same harsh voice. 'I order that this prisoner——'

'Yes, yes,' cried the mob impatiently. 'Throw him to wild beasts? Burn him alive?'

'—— be at once set free,' said Charudatta, smiling kindly on the prisoner. 'No hurt shall befall one who comes as a suppliant to my feet.'

The mob murmured at first; then, shouting applause, cut the cords that bound the trembling wretch. Directly the coward felt his feet free, he ran off, shouting with delight, and never stopped to take breath until he had hidden himself in a dark corner of his palace.

A few minutes later a messenger brought Charudatta a sealed letter from Aryaka, in which the new king made him governor of Ujjain city and the country round it. Charudatta was now as rich as Vasantasena. As no obstacle remained to their union, he asked her to be his wife. But in their happiness they did not forget the kindly mendicant who had restored her to life. The first act of the new governor of Ujjain was to make him head of the chief Buddhist monastery in the kingdom.

RAKSHASA'S SIGNET RING

ONCE upon a time there ruled in Pataliputra, or Patna, a great king, called Sarvarthasiddhi, the last of the great house of the Nandas. He was brave and warlike and had countless soldiers. Above all, he was blessed in a wise and devoted hereditary minister, named Rakshasa.

Sarvarthasiddhi had two queens, the one of high birth called Sunanda, the other beautiful and gracious, but of lower birth, called Mura.

One day a very holy ascetic came to the king's court, and received a welcome worthy of his great sanctity. The king, with his own hands, washed the anchorite's feet, and, after doing so, sprinkled the two queens with the water. Nine drops fell on Sunanda, and she became the mother of nine sons who were all called Nanda. One drop only fell on Mura, and she became the mother of one son only, by name Maurya. When Sarvarthasiddhi grew old, he divided his kingdom among his nine sons and gave Maurya the command of the army.

As time passed, Maurya became the father of many sons, of whom Chandragupta was by far the wisest. One day the Nandas, jealous of their brother, made a false charge against him and his sons, and threw them into a dungeon, meaning to starve them

to death. One by one, Maurya and his sons died, until only Chandragupta was left alive.

One day, when Chandragupta was all but dead, a neighbouring king, the raja of Sinhala, to test the wits of the Nandas, sent them an iron cage containing a wax lion so perfectly fashioned that it seemed alive. With the cage he sent a letter in which he had written, 'I shall own him among you to be a really wise man who can make the lion run away without opening its cage.'

The Nandas thought and thought, but they could think of no trick by which they could make the lion run away without opening its cage.

At last one of the princes said, 'If we don't succeed, the raja of Sinhala will laugh at us and call us men of inferior wit and unworthy to rule. Yet I know no one in the kingdom, except Chandragupta, who can help us. Let us take him out of his dungeon and promise him his life if he finds an answer to the raja's riddle.'

The other princes agreed, and they took Chandragupta out of prison and nursed, fed and clothed him until he was restored to health. Then they said:

'Give us the answer to the raja's riddle and we will let you go free. If you fail, you must go back to your dungeon.'

Chandragupta thought for a moment. Then he heated an iron rod until it was red hot and thrust it

into the wax lion's side. Instantly the wax ran and the lion vanished.

At first the Nandas were very pleased at having found the answer, but they did not cease to hate Chandragupta. They let him go free, but day and night they planned to kill him.

Chandragupta knew their evil designs, and walked so warily that he escaped them. He knew, however, that sooner or later the princes would cause his death. So he called to his aid a great and holy anchorite, Chanakya, and told him all that he had suffered at the hands of the Nandas. Chanakya, when he had heard all, promised Chandragupta their throne.

One day Chanakya entered the dining-room of the palace and seated himself in the seat of honour. The Nandas, having no respect for the anchorite, had him dragged from his seat. Furious, Chanakya stood in the centre of the room, untied the knot of his hair, and vowed not to tie it up again until he had destroyed the nine princes. He then left the city. Chandragupta fled after him, and anchorite and prince began to plot the destruction of the Nandas. To this end they called to their aid a barbarous king, named Parvataka. He marched against the Nandas, defeated them in battle, and slew them all.

After this defeat, the minister, Rakshasa, sent the old king, Sarvarthasiddhi, for safety to a distant

fortress. He himself stayed in Pataliputra and pretended to join Chandragupta's cause. Chanakya guessed the secret of Rakshasa's heart, but he pretended to believe his words.

After a time Rakshasa sent to Chandragupta a beautiful maiden who had secret orders to poison the king. But Chanakya deceived her and made her poison Parvataka instead. By this means he foiled Rakshasa, and at the same time rid himself of his troublesome barbarian ally. He destroyed Vairodhaka, Parvataka's brother, by causing an arch, intended by Rakshasa for Chandragupta's death, to fall on Vairodhaka as he entered the city.

Next, Chanakya warned Parvataka's son, Malayaketu, that a similar fate awaited him unless he fled. He so frightened the barbarous prince that he hastily left the city with his army and Rakshasa.

Only one of the Nandas now remained alive, the old King Sarvarthasiddhi. He left his fortress and retired to the woods to pass his days in penance; giving up food, he drank water only. But Chanakya contrived to have poison put in the water, so that he too died. Chanakya's vow was thus fulfilled.

Rakshasa, however, still longed to avenge his master's death. He went to Malayaketu, and promised the prince that if he would but march against Pataliputra, he could easily add it to his own kingdom. So hated was Chandragupta, Rakshasa said, that his subjects would gladly welcome even a foreign

ruler in his place. Fired by ambition Malayaketu consented, and with a huge host of barbarians marched against Chandragupta.

Chanakya knew that his master's armies could not withstand Malayaketu's forces, for he had tempted five other barbarian kings to join him in plundering Pataliputra. Chanakya, therefore, resolved to do by cunning what he could not achieve by force. His plan was twofold: to divide Rakshasa and Malayaketu by making the latter believe that Rakshasa was a traitor, and to get Rakshasa to come to Pataliputra and then seize him.

Good fortune helped Chanakya. Rakshasa, when fleeing from Pataliputra, had left his wife and children with one Chanandas, a merchant of the city and Rakshasa's devoted friend. One day Nipanaka, one of Chanakya's spies, went to find out what the townspeople were saying. He disguised himself as a wandering showman, and stopped to sing a ballad and amuse the passers-by in front of Chanandas' house. At once Rakshasa's little son, only five years old, ran out to see the show. His mother, Rakshasa's wife, put her hand through the door, to draw the child inside. As she did so, she let slip from off her finger Rakshasa's signet ring, which he had left with her for safety. Not noticing her loss, she closed the outer door. Nipanaka waited until she had gone; then he picked up the ring and took it to Chanakya.

The cunning minister was delighted, and at once dictated to his clerk Siddhartaka a letter which seemed to have been written by Rakshasa to Chandragupta. In it Rakshasa promised that if Chandragupta would give him all the rest of Parvataka's jewels and make Rakshasa his minister in place of Chanakya, Rakshasa would win over the five barbarian allies of Malayaketu, by promising them Malayaketu's kingdom, and would lead the king himself captive to Pataliputra. Having dictated the letter, Chanakya forced one Sakatadas, whom he knew to be Rakshasa's friend and agent, to copy it. Then he gave the false letter to Siddhartaka, with orders that he should go to Malayaketu's camp and contrive to let Malayaketu find it.

'But how can I go to Malayaketu's camp?' asked Siddhartaka. 'Even if I were to reach the camp and see Malayaketu, no one would trust me. All would guess me to be your agent.'

'I have arranged for that,' answered the wily Chanakya. 'I have ordered my officers to take Sakatadas to the burning-ground and there impale him as an enemy of the state. Go now with some men, call yourself Sakatadas' friend, and rescue the doomed man. I have ordered my officers not to resist. You will save Sakatadas and with him flee to Malayaketu's camp. He will then take you to the prince, and he and Rakshasa will hail you as their friend. But the letter will not be enough; I

must seal it with Rakshasa's seal. I must further contrive that, when the letter is found, Rakshasa should be in possession of ornaments that once belonged to Malayaketu's father, Parvataka. Malayaketu will believe they are the first part of the jewels of Parvataka, to which Rakshasa refers in the letter. We must also induce Malayaketu to believe that it was Rakshasa, and not I, who killed his father. The first of these three things is easy, as I have Rakshasa's seal with me. To achieve the second I shall obtain from Chandragupta some of Parvataka's jewels to give to Brahmins. The Brahmins will be my agents who, disguised as merchants, will sell them to Rakshasa. In Malayaketu's hearing, I shall make another of my agents confess that he and Rakshasa together compassed Parvataka's death.'

Siddhartaka, amazed at the mighty schemes of Chanakya, took the letter, sealed with Rakshasa's seal, and went sword in hand to the burning-ground. There, as Chanakya had told him, he found Sakatadas about to be impaled. He rushed to his rescue, and the guards, under Chanakya's orders, fled from his drawn sword. Siddhartaka cut Sakatadas' bonds and both together went to Malayaketu's camp. There they told the story of their escape and both were taken by Rakshasa into his service.

Not long afterwards, the three Brahmin agents of Chanakya appeared in Rakshasa's camp. Disguised as merchants, they offered him for sale three

sets of jewels which had once belonged to Parvataka. Rakshasa, dazzled by their splendour and their low price, bought them. The following day, another agent of Chanakya, Jivasiddhi, contrived to relate to a companion, in Malayaketu's hearing, that he and Rakshasa had together planned Parvataka's death.

Malayaketu's suspicions were now roused against Rakshasa, and the time had come to strike the last blow. Siddhartaka tried to leave Malayaketu's camp, but so clumsily that the guards at once caught him. Brought before Malayaketu, he bore himself so strangely that the king ordered him to be searched. The searchers found on him the letter copied out by Sakatadas at Chanakya's bidding, and sealed by Rakshasa's seal. In this letter Malayaketu found confirmation of his suspicions. He sent for Rakshasa and asked him the arrangements of the morrow's march. To his alarm, he learnt that Rakshasa had placed near him the guards of the barbarian allies. This convinced Malayaketu of Rakshasa's guilt. It was in vain that Rakshasa denied it. On him were found the jewels that he had bought from the pretended merchants sent by Chanakya. Malayaketu recognized them as some that his father had often worn. Siddhartaka also falsely confessed that Rakshasa had given him the letter to take to Chanakya. Malayaketu no longer tried to control his wrath. He had the barbarian princes

buried alive in a pit, that they might thus gratify their greed for his lands. With rare generosity, he let Rakshasa go free, and then marched with his army upon Pataliputra. On the way his chief captains, angry at the execution of his allies, deserted him, and their desertion was so widely followed that, by the time Malayaketu reached the gates of Pataliputra he was almost alone. Chandragupta marched out to meet him and easily defeated him.

Chanakya not only wished to defend Chandragupta against his foes. He also wished that Rakshasa, the hereditary minister of the Nanda kings, should become the hereditary minister of Chandragupta. He therefore ordered the impalement of Chanandas on the charge of having housed and befriended Rakshasa's family. He knew that Rakshasa would return to Pataliputra if he could, to try to save his friend. Chanakya's wisdom was once more proved. Rakshasa, dismissed by Malayaketu, hastened with all speed to Pataliputra. He was detected and arrested by Chanakya's spies. But instead of cruel death Rakshasa was offered the post of minister to Chandragupta. At first he refused through loyalty to the race of Nanda.

'Then,' said Chandragupta, 'Chanandas must die on the impaling stake. His life is forfeit unless you consent to save him. Become my minister, and not only shall you have wealth and office, but your friend shall instantly be released.'

'I can but accept,' said Rakshasa. 'Nevertheless, I would make one condition.'

'It is the minister's first request,' laughed Chanakya. 'You cannot, O king, refuse it.'

'What is it, then?' said Chandragupta.

'Grant Malayaketu his life,' replied Rakshasa. 'He spared me when he might well have killed me. Let him go back a free man to his own kingdom.'

'The prayer is granted,' said Chandragupta.

'Now my task is done,' said Chanakya. 'I have destroyed the Nandas and have raised Chandragupta in their place. The Nandas' minister is his devoted servant; and nothing more can shake the throne. I, too, have a prayer to make. Let me return to the life of an anchorite, and abandon to you, O king, and your minister, the cares of office.'

'Your prayer, too, is granted,' said Chandragupta, throwing himself at the anchorite's feet as a sign of his gratitude for all that he had accomplished.

THE CLOUD MESSENGER

ONCE upon a time Kuber, the god of wealth, grew angry with one of his Yakshas, the immortal beings who guarded the gates of Chaitraratha, the beautiful garden that stretched out beyond the god's celestial city, Alaka.

Some say that the cause of the god's anger was that, a few weeks before, the Yaksha had taken to himself a young and lovely wife. In his haste to go back home, he forgot one night to close the gates of Chaitraratha. They stayed open all night, and Airavat, the sacred elephant that Indra won when the gods churned the ocean, entered the garden and trod down all the beautiful flower-beds inside. Next morning Kuber, on waking, saw the havoc done and threw the Yaksha into prison.

Others say that Kuber had bidden the Yakshra rise at dawn and bring him every morning a nosegay of flowers with which to worship the god of gods Maheshvar. The Yaksha could not bear to leave his wife so early; so he gathered overnight the nosegay of flowers that the god needed. Now a bee had been sucking the honey of one of the lotuses that the Yaksha picked. So sweet was the honey that the bee would not leave it. As darkness fell the lotus closed and the bee was caught

inside its petals, and kept there all night. Next morning, when Kuber handled the nosegay, the lotus opened in the sun. The bee came out, and, in its folly, thinking that Kuber was to blame for its captivity, flew at him and stung his finger. Kuber, maddened with pain, sent for the Yaksha and punished him.

Whatever the cause of the god's anger may have been, this is certain: Kuber sent his servant, the Yaksha, to prison for a whole year.

Now if the Yaksha had been unwilling to leave his lovely girl-wife even for a few hours, he was in despair at the thought of a whole year's separation from her. The spot where Kuber imprisoned the Yaksha was the Ramagiri mountain where Rama and Sita had passed a part of their exile. After some months of captivity, the poor Yaksha saw a great cloud that hung upon the mountainside. The cloud, in some strange way, gave him hope, and he offered to it fresh forest flowers, that he might win its sympathy. After he had worshipped it and prayed to it, the cloud seemed to his despairing eyes to smile at him. So he thought that he would beg it, as it journeyed, to give to his wife in their home at Alaka a token and a message. He asked the cloud to go north until it reached Amarakuta mountain, on whose summit it should pause so that the peak of the dark hill, coming through the cloud's snow-white fleece, would seem to be one of the breasts of the

broad earth. It should next pass over Dasharna land, and Vidisha, on the banks of the rippling Vetravati, and then in turn over Ujjain, Avanti, Devagiri, and Brahmavarta, until at last it reached Kailas mountain. In Kailas dwell Maheshvar and Parvati. The cloud, therefore, should rest on Kailas and do homage to its dwellers by dropping on them a cooling shower. It should renew itself in lake Manas, on whose surface grow the golden lotuses, and then move onward until it reached Alaka city.

'There, at Alaka,' said the Yaksha, 'the trees are ever in blossom and round their flowers the bees hum always. The pools are gay with lotuses and with the plumage of the pink flamingoes and the peacocks along their banks. All night long and every night shines the moon, and it lights up the endless gardens that are spread around that celestial city. Therein, to the north of the god Kuber's palace, is my home. It has a porch arched like a rainbow, and by it stands a young *mandara* tree that must now be in flower. Near the tree is a well, with a flight of stone steps that lead down to its clear waters. By the well are a red *asoka* tree and a *bakula* tree. On the doorway are painted pictures of Kuber's war horn and lotus. By these signs, dear Cloud,' continued the Yaksha, 'you will know my home. My beloved will be sitting in an inner room. Her *vina* will be lying neglected in her lap, or she will be trying, with a voice broken with sobs, to sing

my favourite music. Perhaps she may be counting one by one, by means of wild flowers, the days that still remain of my captivity; or she may be talking to her myna and asking it if it still keeps any memory of its master. Tell her then that her husband lies a

'My beloved will be sitting in an inner room'

captive in far-off Ramagiri, and that he is torn with grief and longing. All that he sees around him recalls to him his beloved. The *shyama* creepers remind him of the waving graces of her form, the eyes of the startled fawn recall to him her timid glances, the

ripples that play upon the waters bring back to him the happy smiles that once played over her features. But, dear Cloud, although my beloved will listen to your message with the same rapture with which Sita heard Rama's from the lips of Hanuman, she will ask you for a token. Say to her this: "Once you lay asleep with your arms round your hus-hand's neck and you woke up with a scream. He asked you the cause of your fright. For a long time you were silent, but at last you owned that in a dream you had seen your husband wooing another." '

Such was the depth of the Yaksha's grief and such the tenderness of his words, that the Cloud took pity on him. Drifting loose from the peak of Ramagiri, it took the course of which the Yaksha had spoken. It flew at lightning speed through the sky until it reached Alaka. There it found the Yaksha's house and inside it the beautiful girl who mourned her absent husband. Speaking with a human voice, the Cloud gave to her the token and the messages, and they gave her courage to endure the months of separation that still remained.

But the Cloud could not rest—so deeply had it been moved by the Yaksha's sorrow. It passed from the Yaksha's home to the palace of the god Kuber and repeated to him all that had passed. The god, in his turn, was as moved as the Cloud had been, and long before the year was over he had set the Yaksha free and had bidden him return home to his beloved.

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Author Armour, A.S

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